

Evolutionarily revolutionary By Joe Sage

We had noted two major points about the all-new 2013 Ford Escape last year: [a] that it was a complete revamp, restyle and reinvention; and [b] that there was no longer a hybrid version (for that, they push you to the C-MAX, but it offers no four-wheel drive). All this is the same for 2014.

We had predicted the new Escape would maintain Ford's spot at the top of the small SUV segment and might even steal customers from premium and near luxury brands. They are on the roads in volume; final year-end numbers will tell the tale.

Our Escape arrived with 3075 miles on the odo, feeling fresh out of the box—tight and solid. Steering was absolutely sure-footed. Its 240 hp and 270 lb-ft of torque were more than enough to power the Escape's 3769 pounds through multi-lane challenges. Neither Drive or Sport shifted as fast as we'd like, but we tailored this through use of the manumatic. Overall, we were impressed, and our performance often surprised others, too.

This 2-liter EcoBoost is by far the quickest of three available engines. It beats a 1.6L EcoBoost

(at 168 hp), and also outstrips a bigger 2.5-liter conventional four-cylinder (at just 170 lb-ft). Fuel mileage is about the same on all three engines, but this Escape can tow 3500 pounds (the 1.6L EcoBoost can tow 2500 and the 2.5L just 1500).

An entry level S trim, at \$22,700, only offers the 2.5L and front-wheel drive. The midrange SE (\$25,550-\$28,495) or Titanium (\$29,100-\$32,045) offer the two EcoBoost engines and either FWD or 4WD. The 2.0L EcoBoost adds about \$1200 over the 1.6L, while 4WD adds about \$1800 (and about 140 lbs). We would add both. Again, the larger engine's power is significantly higher, as is tow capacity, while fuel economy is very close. The bigger EcoBoost does prefer 91 octane premium fuel, though it will accept 87 regular (which is all the others need, period).

The small utility category is red hot, with fine machines from just about everybody. Some of the Escape's features can annoy (see sidebar), but performance and capability are strong. The top-selling Ford Escape belongs on your short list. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	2.0L 4-cylinder EcoBoost
POWER	240 hp, 270 lb-ft torque
TRANSMISSION	8-speed automatic
DRIVETRAIN	all-wheel drive
GROUND CLEARANCE	7.9 inches
TOWING CAPACITY	3500 lbs
MPG	21/28/24 (city/hwy/comb)
INCLUDED:	auto halogen headlamps, fog lamps, keyless entry keypad, keyless start, 10-way power seat w lumbar, dual-zone electronic auto climate, heated front seats, illuminated entry, leather trim, Sony premium audio, MyFord Touch, Sync voice activation, privacy glass, rear camera.

BASE PRICE	\$30,850
EQUIPMENT GROUP 401A:	Titanium tech package, HID auto headlamps, blind spot system, active park assist.....
ENGINE: 2.0L I-4 GTDI EcoBoost.....	4495
OPTIONS: Navigation	795
19" alloy luster nickel wheel	595
DESTINATION CHARGE:.....	895
TOTAL	\$36,065



LOGBOOK NOTES

We weren't always nuts about the *controls*, but some of the *controllers* (see stalks, above) were very cool, designwise.

Initial setup of features was simple and straightforward, which may sound like no big news, but is currently very noteworthy.

Radio tuning was a royal pain, with major options only cycling in one long direction. Allocation of touch and physical buttons is non-intuitive at times. Some key settings return to defaults every time you have left the vehicle and restart it (we spent time with the manual and interface, but couldn't rectify this). Sometimes divergent multiple controls perform related functions, and sometimes integrated controls perform unrelated functions. Maybe you'll get used to them all over time, and maybe you won't.



Anecdotally (eyeballing the needle against actual odometer readings), we didn't seem to achieve any great fuel mileage. But then again, we were using the same ol' lead foot we always use.

